Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Previously Presented) An easy-opening, retortable container comprising:

a base portion having a bottom and side defining an interior space and an opening thereto; and

a plastic membrane of sufficient size to cover the opening and having an outer peripheral area attached to the base portion by a radiation weakened bond, the radiation weakened bond being formed of an adhesive and having a predetermined tensile force strength; and

wherein the predetermined tensile force strength of the weakened bond allows easy-opening of the container by peeling the membrane from the base portion.

2. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the base portion is formed of plastic.

3. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the base portion includes a plastic end ring fusion bonded to a body member, the end ring having an outer peripheral area adapted to be joined to the side of the base portion and defining the opening, the plastic membrane being attached to the end ring by the bond.

4. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the predetermined tensile force strength is less than about 14 pounds.

5. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the membrane and the base portion are formed of a high barrier material to prevent transmission of moisture and oxygen therethrough.

6. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the membrane is formed of a co-extruded sheet of polypropylene and ethylene vinyl alcohol.

7. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the membrane includes oxygen scavengers disposed in polyolefin.

8. (Canceled)

9. (Previously Presented) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the adhesive is formed of polyurethane.

10. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the bond is weakened by microwave radiation.

11. (Previously Presented) An easy-opening, retortable container comprising:

a base portion having a bottom and side defining an interior space and an opening thereto; and

a plastic membrane of sufficient size to cover the opening and having an outer peripheral area attached to the base portion by a bond, the bond being formed of an adhesive and having a predetermined shear force strength and configured to be radiation weakened to have a predetermined tensile force strength; and

wherein the predetermined shear force strength of the bond is sufficient to withstand forces created during retort processing of the container, and the predetermined tensile force strength of the bond allows easy-opening of the container by peeling the membrane from the base portion.

12. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 11 wherein the base portion is formed of plastic.

13. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 11 wherein the base portion includes a plastic end ring fusion bonded to a body member, the end ring having an outer peripheral area adapted to be joined to the side of the base portion and defining the opening, the plastic membrane being attached to the end ring by the bond.

14. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 11 wherein the predetermined shear force strength is at least about 20 psi, and the predetermined tensile force strength is less than about 14 pounds.

15. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 11 wherein the membrane and the base portion are formed of a high barrier material to prevent transmission of moisture and oxygen therethrough.

16. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 11 wherein the membrane is formed of a co-extruded sheet of polypropylene and ethylene vinyl alcohol.

17. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 11 wherein the membrane includes oxygen scavengers disposed in polyolefin.

18. (Canceled)

19. (Previously Presented) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 11 wherein the adhesive is formed of polyurethane.

20. (Original) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 11 wherein the bond is adapted to be weakened by microwave radiation.

21. (Previously Presented) An easy-opening closure for hermetic sealing of an open end of a retortable container, the closure comprising:

a plastic end ring having an outside peripheral area adapted to be joined to the open end of the retortable container and an intermediate area extending radially inward from the outer peripheral area and defining an opening to allow access therethrough to the interior of the container; and

a plastic membrane of sufficient size to cover the opening and having an outer peripheral area overlapping and attached to the intermediate area of the end ring by a bond, the bond being formed of an adhesive disposed between the plastic end ring and the plastic membrane and having a predetermined shear force strength and configured to be radiation weakened to have a predetermined tensile force strength; and

wherein the predetermined shear force strength of the bond is sufficient to withstand forces created during retort processing of the container, and the predetermined tensile force strength of the bond allows easy-opening of the container by peeling the membrane from the end ring.

22. (Original) An easy-opening closure according to Claim 21 wherein the plastic end ring is configured to be fusion welded to the container.

23. (Original) An easy-opening closure according to Claim 21 wherein the end ring is formed of plastic.

24. (Original) An easy-opening closure according to Claim 21 wherein the predetermined shear force strength is at least about 20 psi, and the predetermined tensile force strength is less than about 14 pounds.

25. (Original) An easy-opening closure according to Claim 21 wherein the membrane is formed of a high barrier material to prevent transmission of moisture and oxygen therethrough.

26. (Original) An easy-opening closure according to Claim 21 wherein the membrane is formed of a co-extruded sheet of polypropylene and ethylene vinyl alcohol.

27. (Original) An easy-opening closure according to Claim 21 wherein the membrane includes oxygen scavengers disposed in polyolefin.

28. (Canceled)

29. (Previously Presented) An easy-opening closure according to Claim 21 wherein the bond is formed of polyurethane.

30. (Original) An easy-opening closure according to Claim 21 wherein the bond is adapted to be weakened by microwave radiation.

Claims 31-39. (Canceled)

40. (Previously Presented) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the weakened bond is defined by a radiation weakened adhesive disposed between the base portion and the plastic membrane.

41. (Previously Presented) An easy-opening, retortable container according to Claim 1 wherein the radiation weakened adhesive consists of radiation weakened polyurethane.

42. (Canceled)